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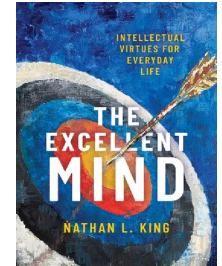


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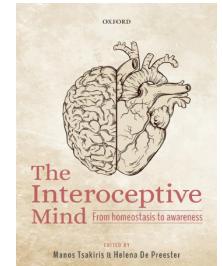
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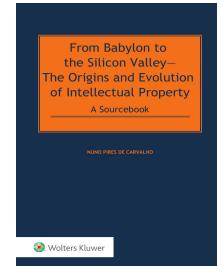
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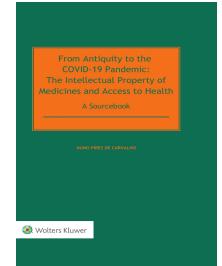
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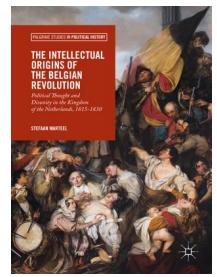
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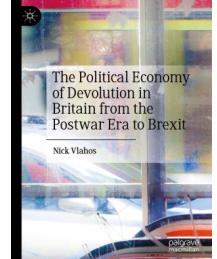
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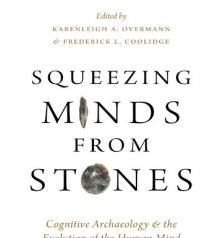
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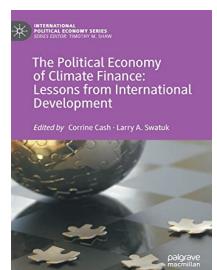
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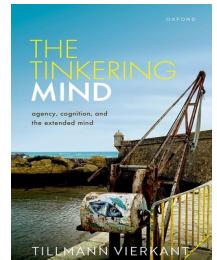
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from the intellectual to the political



A black silhouette of a man in a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie stands behind a podium. He is gesturing with his right hand raised and open, and his left arm extended downwards. A microphone stand is positioned in front of him. The background is a solid teal color.

VICES *of* the MIND

QUASSIM CASSAM

Vices of the Mind

Vices of the Mind

*From the Intellectual
to the Political*

Quassim Cassam

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For Deborah

Preface

In her book *Thinking to Some Purpose*, published in 1939, Susan Stebbing wrote, ‘There is an urgent need today for the citizens of a democracy to think well. It is not enough to have freedom of the press and parliamentary institutions.’ Our difficulties, she suggested, ‘are due partly to our own stupidity, partly to the exploitation of that stupidity, and partly to our own prejudices and personal desires’. Perhaps it didn’t need saying in 1939 which difficulties she was referring to. Her book is an attempt to encourage her readers to improve their thinking by alerting them to some of the varieties of flawed thinking to which we are prone. For example, there is what Stebbing calls ‘twisted thinking’. My thinking is twisted ‘when I believe I am thinking effectively and have discovered sound reasons for my conclusion but am mistaken in this belief’. Stebbing’s technique is to illustrate this and other types of flawed thinking with examples taken from the political debates of her day, and this gives her book a practical focus to which she obviously attached great importance.

It isn’t hard to understand why, writing on the eve of a world war, Stebbing thought it was important to identify the intellectual vices that contributed to the disasters of the 1930s. It would be naïve to suppose that improved thinking would have been enough to avert the rise of fascism but the idea that ‘our difficulties’ at that time were partly due to our intellectual defects and partly to the exploitation of those defects is one that will resonate with many readers today. It certainly resonated with me when I sat down to write this book in 2016. It would be fatuous to compare the historical significance of 2016 with that of 1939, though one might also take the view that it’s too early to tell. Nevertheless, from my perspective and I suspect the perspective of many readers of this book, 2016 was a very bad year, a true *annus horribilis* which saw the rise of extremism in Europe and America, the political disintegration of parts of the Middle East, the Brexit vote in the UK, and the election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States.

Readers who are unconcerned about these developments will probably see no reason why they should be of any great philosophical, as distinct

from political, interest. If, like me, you view these developments with dismay there is a pressing and obvious question: how on earth could such things have happened? The answer to this question is no doubt complex but—and this is in the spirit of Stebbing—it's hard not to think that stupidity and the exploitation of that stupidity have something to do with it. Stupidity in this context means foolishness, not lack of intelligence. It is one of the intellectual vices that Stebbing identifies. Others include prejudice and closed-mindedness. Prejudice is an attitude whereas closed-mindedness is most naturally understood as a character trait. Intellectual vices come in several different varieties and are not confined to flawed thinking. The relationship between thinking styles, attitudes, and character traits will come up several times in this book.

Intellectual vices or, as I prefer to call them, ‘epistemic’ vices are systematically harmful ways of thinking, attitudes, or character traits. Epistemic vices are, first and foremost, *epistemically* harmful and the other harms they cause—including political harms—are a consequence of their epistemic harms. Epistemic vices get in the way of knowledge. They obstruct the gaining, keeping, and sharing of knowledge and it’s because they do that that they can have disastrous consequences in the political realm. The eight chapters that follow give examples of some of these consequences. Each chapter begins with a detailed description of a significant event or development—often a politically significant event or development—in the unfolding of which epistemic vices of one type or another appear to have played a not insignificant role. Like Stebbing, I use real-world events to build an understanding of the nature of epistemic vices. Vice epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, identity, and epistemological significance of epistemic vices. In these terms, this book is an exercise in vice epistemology, but not a purely abstract philosophical exercise. Understanding epistemic vices helps us to understand our world and ourselves.

Indeed, it was an interest in self-knowledge, rather than an interest in politics, that got me going on the topic of epistemic vice. In my last book, *Self-Knowledge for Humans* (2014), I made the point that we don’t always know why we believe the things we believe. I gave the example of Oliver, a believer in outlandish conspiracy theories, who thinks he believes his conspiracy theories because he has good reasons to believe them. In reality, his bizarre beliefs are more a reflection of his intellectual vices, his gullibility for example, than the evidence. I quoted Linda

Zagzebski's list of intellectual vices: 'intellectual pride, negligence, idleness, cowardice, conformity, carelessness, rigidity, prejudice, wishful thinking, closed-mindedness, insensitivity to detail, obtuseness, and lack of thoroughness'. I knew the study of intellectual or epistemic *virtues* was a thriving philosophical cottage industry and I assumed that those who had written so much about virtues of the mind would have quite a bit to say about vices of the mind. Not so. In comparison to the vast literature on epistemic virtue the philosophical literature on epistemic vice is minuscule, though it does include some excellent contributions by Jason Baehr, Heather Battaly, Miranda Fricker, Ian James Kidd, and Alessandra Tanesini, among others.

The relative unpopularity of epistemic vice as a topic in philosophy came as a surprise as it seemed obvious to me that without a proper understanding of our epistemic vices there is little hope of a realistic understanding of how most humans actually think, reason, and inquire. For example, finding answers to questions is a fundamental human activity that goes more or less well depending on the extent to which how we go about doing this is influenced by our epistemic vices. In Chapter 1 I give the example of the disastrous attempts by senior members of the Bush administration to figure out how many troops would be needed after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Arrogance and overconfidence were two of the factors that caused Donald Rumsfeld and his colleagues to go so badly wrong in their thinking and planning. Arrogance and overconfidence are epistemic vices and the Iraq fiasco is an object lesson in how vices of the mind can obstruct our attempts to know things.

I call my view of epistemic vice 'obstructivism' to emphasize the fact that epistemic vices get in the way of knowledge. But not everything that gets in the way of knowledge is an epistemic vice. Epistemic vices are *intellectual* defects that get in the way of knowledge, and the point of calling them *vices* is to suggest that they are blameworthy or in some other sense reprehensible. In these terms, the intellectual arrogance that contributed to the Iraq fiasco was an epistemic vice but insomnia is not even if chronic lack of sleep makes us worse at gaining or retaining knowledge. Insomnia is neither an intellectual defect nor, at least in most cases, blameworthy. Even in the case of epistemic vices for which blame doesn't seem appropriate, there must be room for criticism. Intellectual flaws for which a person can be neither blamed nor criticized are mere defects rather than *vices*.

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One of the dangers of using political examples to illustrate philosophical points is that it doesn't take long for these examples to become outdated. One of Stebbing's early examples is a speech given by the then British foreign secretary Austen Chamberlain in 1925. Reading Stebbing's account today, she might as well have been describing events on Mars. Politics is best avoided if one is writing for posterity but I'm not doing that any more than Stebbing was. Another concern about trying to explain political or historical events by reference to the epistemic vices of particular individuals is that such explanations are too personal and neglect more important structural factors. Structuralists think that people occupy places in complex networks of social relations and that this, rather than personal factors, explains their conduct. Another view is that flawed thinking has more to do with 'sub-personal' cognitive biases—the sort of thing described by Daniel Kahneman in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*—than with so-called epistemic vices.

I certainly don't want to downplay the explanatory significance of structural factors or cognitive biases. Nor is it my intention to suggest that the events described in this book can be adequately understood just by reference to epistemic vices. Satisfying explanations of our intellectual conduct are usually multidimensional, and structural and sub-personal factors are often a part of the explanatory story. But so, in many cases, are epistemic vices. There is more about this at the end of Chapter 1. As I argue there, when our thinking goes wrong or our inquiries fail to uncover obvious truths the explanation *is* sometimes personal. Having said that, I should also say that the examples I give are for illustrative purposes only, and that readers who disagree with my reading of them should still be able to see their philosophical point. I can well imagine some readers detecting in my discussion some of the very same vices that I attribute to others. I don't claim to be free of the epistemic vices described below.

The plan for this book is very simple. Chapter 1 sketches the fundamental tenets of obstructivism. Chapter 2 is a study of the vice of closed-mindedness. I take this to be a character vice—an epistemic vice that takes the form of a character trait—and the example I give is the closed-mindedness that led intelligence officers in Israel to dismiss evidence of an impending attack by Egypt and Syria in 1973. Chapter 3 is about thinking vices, as illustrated by some judicial thinking in the case of the Birmingham Six, who were wrongly convicted for terrorist outrages in

the 1970s. Chapter 4 focuses on epistemic vices that are attitudes rather than character traits. One such attitude, which was on display in the run-up to Brexit, is epistemic insouciance, which is a kind of indifference to truth. Chapter 5 gives an account of knowledge and how epistemic vices get in the way of knowledge. A key question here is whether epistemic vices like dogmatism can protect our knowledge when it is under attack. I found it helpful to think about Holocaust denial in this connection. Chapter 6 asks whether our epistemic vices are blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible. Chapter 7 is about stealthy vices, epistemic vices that are inherently hard to detect. This stealthiness is what accounts for the difficulty that most of us have in knowing our epistemic vices. Finally, in Chapter 8, I conclude with a moderately optimistic account of the prospects of self-improvement in respect of our epistemic vices.

Material from Chapter 4 has appeared previously in my paper ‘Epistemic Insouciance’, published in the *Journal of Philosophical Research*, volume 43 (2018). Chapter 7 is based on my paper ‘Stealthy Vices’, published in *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, volume 4 (2015). I thank the editors of both journals for permission to reuse this material. The paper that got me started on vice epistemology was my article ‘Vice Epistemology’, which came out in *The Monist*, volume 99 (2016).

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1

The Anatomy of Vice

At a press conference after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld was questioned about the scenes of chaos and looting in Baghdad. ‘Stuff happens’ was his response to indications that things weren’t exactly going according to plan. As events unfolded it was becoming increasingly clear that the architects of the invasion—Rumsfeld, President George W. Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney, and deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz—had seriously underestimated the potential for an Iraqi insurgency and the troop numbers needed to contain it.

How could they have been so wrong? One study suggests there was little planning for maintaining order and stability after the invasion because it was thought that the task would be easy.¹ The Bush administration assumed that Iraq 2003 would be a cakewalk but the reality was different.² Senior administration figures believed that American soldiers would be welcomed with open arms by the Iraqis and that local security forces would willingly assist the occupation of their own country by a foreign power.³ Even at the time these assumptions seemed a barely credible exercise in wishful thinking, and their naïvety was demonstrated by the disaster that unfolded after the invasion. How could Rumsfeld and other members of the administration have believed that things would be so easy? What were they thinking?

In his account, Thomas E. Ricks points out that senior figures in the military, including army chief of staff General Eric Shinseki, had argued

¹ This was a study by the Rand Corporation quoted in Ricks 2007: 78–9. I’ve drawn extensively on Ricks’ book in this chapter. I’m aware that not all readers will agree with Ricks about Iraq.

² The administration’s attitude was well expressed by a 2002 *Washington Post* column by Kenneth Adelman. The title of the column was ‘Cakewalk in Iraq’.

³ See Ricks 2007: 110–11.

that at least 300,000 troops would be needed to pacify Iraq.⁴ Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld thought they knew better and insisted on a much lower number, below 40,000.⁵ They didn't just ignore Shinseki's advice, they derided it. According to Wolfowitz, claims that several hundred thousand US troops would be needed were 'wildly off the mark', and it wasn't credible that more soldiers would be needed to keep order after the invasion than to invade Iraq in the first place.⁶ He got his way, and when the looting in Baghdad started the US military lacked the resources to do anything about it. It seems obvious in retrospect that Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld should have listened to Shinseki. Why didn't they?

This is where, in Ricks' account, things start to get personal. The story, as he tells it, is that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz, the four horsemen of the Iraqi apocalypse, acted as they did because they were 'arrogant', 'impervious to evidence', and 'unable to deal with mistakes'.⁷ The president was incompetent, Wolfowitz was a know-it-all who didn't know it all, and Rumsfeld's 'Stuff happens' remark was one among many indications of his hubris and arrogance. Ricks also mentions what he calls 'systemic' factors, but the overall impression is that the Iraq fiasco was due in large part to the *personal* failings of President Bush and some of his senior colleagues.

My concern here isn't with whether Ricks' analysis is correct—this isn't a book about the Iraq war—but the nature of the personal failings he draws on to explain the Iraq fiasco. So-called 'virtues of the mind'—open-mindedness, thoroughness, humility, and so on—have been extensively discussed by philosophers.⁸ Arrogance, imperviousness to evidence, and an inability to deal with mistakes are vices of the mind. The dictionary definition of 'vice' is 'evil or grossly immoral conduct'. This isn't the sense in which vices of the mind are vices. 'Vice' is from the Latin *vitiū*, which is a fault or a defect. Vices of the mind are personal intellectual failings that have a negative impact on our intellectual conduct.⁹ If Ricks is right then arrogance, imperviousness to evidence, and

⁴ Ricks 2007.

⁵ See Ricks 2007: 68–74 and also chapter 8 of Andrew Cockburn 2007.

⁶ See the account in Ricks 2007: 97–8.

⁷ These descriptions are all from Ricks 2007.

⁸ Book-length discussions of intellectual virtues include Kvanvig 1992, Montmarquet 1993, Zagzebski 1996, Roberts and Wood 2007, Baehr 2011, and Battaly 2015.

⁹ See the discussion below on why I prefer 'failing' to 'defect'.

an inability to deal with mistakes were among the intellectual failings that prevented Rumsfeld from coming to know the answers to certain rather pertinent questions, such as: how many American troops will be needed after the invasion? Rumsfeld's vices prevented him from listening to military advisors who knew the answer to this question better than he did. As a result he got it wrong.

I'm using this example not in order to make a political point but because it perfectly illustrates how vices of the mind are obstacles to knowledge or how, as José Medina puts it, they 'get in the way of knowledge' (2013: 30). There was knowledge to be had but Rumsfeld missed out on it because of his attitude towards those who had it. Suppose that Shinseki knew what he was talking about and tried to share his knowledge with Rumsfeld. He was prevented from doing so by Rumsfeld's unwillingness to listen and his unfounded conviction that he knew better. For Rumsfeld, 'military dissent about Iraq had to be considered the result of ignorance' (Ricks 2007: 42) and he showed his disdain for Shinseki by naming his successor fourteen months prior to his retirement. This is the kind of behaviour that led John Batiste, who turned down the position of commander of US forces in Iraq, to comment: 'The trouble with Don Rumsfeld is that he's contemptuous, he's dismissive, he's arrogant and he doesn't listen' (Cockburn 2007: 215). A list of the intellectual vices that contributed to the Iraq fiasco would also include dogmatism, closed-mindedness, prejudice, wishful thinking, overconfidence, and gullibility. It's easy to detect overconfidence and wishful thinking in the assumption that Iraq could be subjugated with just 40,000 soldiers.¹⁰ Rumsfeld's unwillingness to tolerate dissent is evidence of closed-mindedness and dogmatism. Senior members of the administration were gullible if they believed reports of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD). And so on.

Intellectual vices are obstacles to knowledge, but not all obstacles to knowledge are intellectual vices. For example, suppose that acute insomnia makes people who suffer from it forgetful and inattentive during waking hours. That would be a reason to classify insomnia as an obstacle to knowledge, but not as an intellectual vice unless one is prepared to

¹⁰ On the role of overconfidence in promoting war, see Johnson 2004. As Johnson points out, 'overconfidence contributes to causing war' (2004: 5). The 2003 Iraq War is a textbook example of this phenomenon.

view it as an *intellectual* defect. The distinction between intellectual and other defects is hard to define but, at an intuitive level, conditions like insomnia aren't conditions of the intellect even though they undoubtedly have intellectual consequences.¹¹ Forgetfulness and inattentiveness sound more like intellectual defects but they aren't intellectual vices for a different reason: they aren't defects for which a person can reasonably be criticized, at least where they are caused by insomnia. Defects that don't merit criticism aren't intellectual *vices* regardless of whether they get in the way of knowledge. Some intellectual vices are severely criticized. Others are seen as only mildly reprehensible, but there is no such thing as an intellectual vice that merits no criticism at all.¹²

Sometimes it's difficult to know whether a trait is a vice or not because it is difficult to know whether it gets in the way of knowledge. For example, the classification of closed-mindedness as an epistemic vice can be challenged on the grounds that this trait can protect a person's knowledge by making them less susceptible to being misled by people who know less than they do. This sort of worry can be dealt with by stipulating that the classification of closed-mindedness as a vice of the mind depends on whether it *normally* or *systematically* gets in the way of knowledge, not on whether it invariably does so.¹³ In the case of stupidity, another defect that was on prominent display in Ricks' story, the question is not whether it gets in the way of knowledge—it obviously does—but whether it is genuinely reprehensible. Is a person's stupidity something for which they can reasonably be criticized? Not if stupidity is understood as lack of intelligence, but it can also be understood as foolishness or lack of common sense.¹⁴ Stupidity in this sense is a reprehensible obstacle to knowledge, a genuine intellectual vice.

¹¹ The point I'm making here is similar to one that Casey Swank makes in a helpful discussion. What I have so far been calling intellectual virtues and vices Swank calls 'epistemic' virtues and vices. Swank points out that 'it has always just gone without saying that (whatever else they might be) epistemic virtues and vices are, to begin with, epistemic traits' (2000: 197). However, although the distinction is often clear, in practice it's probably a fool's errand trying to come up with necessary and sufficient conditions for a trait or defect to be specifically epistemic or intellectual.

¹² 'Reprehensible' is sometimes defined as 'deserving of strong criticism'. I take it to mean 'deserving of some criticism'. 'Mildly reprehensible' is not an oxymoron.

¹³ See Driver 2001: 82 on the importance of the qualification 'systematically'. However, she is mainly concerned with moral rather than intellectual virtues and vices.

¹⁴ On the distinction between these two kinds of stupidity see Mulligan 2014.

Another label for intellectual vice is ‘epistemic vice’. I prefer this label because it highlights the fact that these vices get in the way of knowledge. In effect, Ricks attributes a bunch of epistemic vices to Rumsfeld and his colleagues and explains their intellectual and other conduct partly by reference to these vices. Such ‘vice explanations’ are familiar enough in politics and history, and in later chapters I’ll give other examples that cast light on the notion of an epistemic vice. An objection to vice explanations is that they are too personal and ignore more important factors, including the systemic factors that Ricks mentions. It’s hard to assess this suggestion without greater clarity about the nature of systemic and other alternatives to vice explanations. Plainly, a convincing account of the events described by Ricks needs to be multidimensional. From a vice perspective the important point is not that Rumsfeld’s decisions can be explained by reference to any single factor but that, if Ricks is to be believed, epistemic vices are among the factors that help us to make sense of his thinking and his decisions.

Because of its emphasis on the role of epistemic vices in obstructing knowledge I call my account *obstructivism*. The emphasis in obstructivism is on the *consequences* of epistemic vices for our knowledge rather than on their *motives*. The contrast is with motivational accounts of epistemic vice, which are based on motivational accounts of epistemic virtue. These see the epistemic virtues as ‘rooted in a deep and abiding desire for knowledge’ (Baehr 2011: 4). Whether or not this view of epistemic virtue has anything going for it, epistemic vices aren’t rooted in a desire for ignorance and needn’t have epistemic motives that account for their badness. For obstructivism, epistemic vices don’t have to have bad motives and aren’t vices because they have bad motives. For example, closed-mindedness is motivated by a desire for firm answers rather than confusion or ambiguity, but it is far from obvious that such a desire is a bad motive or one that accounts for the badness of closed-mindedness.

It’s hard to talk about epistemic or other vices without mentioning Aristotle. As will soon become apparent, there are many disagreements between obstructivism and accounts of epistemic vice inspired by Aristotle, but there are a couple of points on which agreement is possible. One is that vices are harmful. Aristotelian accounts emphasize the harmfulness of vices for their possessor.¹⁵ For obstructivism epistemic vices are

¹⁵ Taylor 2006 is a good example of this approach.

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Rougon paced up and down, full of shame; while she let go of the bell-rope, sat down at the table again, and compounded herself a glass of sugar and water.

'Well, I got a letter from my husband yesterday,' she quietly resumed. 'I had so much to do this morning that I should probably have broken my promise to come and lunch with you if I hadn't wanted to show you that letter. See, here it is! It reminds you of your promises.'

Rougon took the letter and read it as he walked about the room. Then he threw it on the table in front of Clorinde with a gesture expressive of weariness.

'Well?' she asked.

He made no immediate reply, but stretched himself and yawned. 'He is a simpleton,' he said at last.

Clorinde was greatly offended. For some time past she had not tolerated any doubt of her husband's capabilities. She bent her head for a moment and repressed the rebellious twitchings of her hands. She was gradually emerging from her disciple-like submissiveness, draining, as it were, from Rougon sufficient of his strength to enable her to confront him as a formidable foe.

'If we were to show this letter, it would be all over with him,' said the minister, impelled by Clorinde's disdain to avenge himself upon her husband. 'Ah! it isn't so easy as you suppose to find a place that he's fit for.'

'You are exaggerating, my friend,' replied Clorinde, after a short pause. 'You used to say that he had a great future before him. He possesses some sterling good qualities; and it isn't always the sharpest men who go furthest!'

Rougon, however, still paced the room, and shrugged his shoulders.

'It is to your interest that he should join the ministry,' continued Clorinde. 'You would have a supporter in him. If it is true, as is reported, that the Minister of Commerce and Agriculture is in bad

health and wishes to retire, the opportunity is a splendid one. My husband is quite competent to perform the duties of the office, and his mission to Italy would make his selection quite natural. You know that the Emperor is very fond of him, and that they get on very well together. They have the same ideas on many subjects. A word from you would settle the matter.'

Rougon took two or three more turns before replying. Then, halting in front of Clorinde, he said: 'Well, after all, I am agreeable. He won't be the only simpleton in office. But I'm doing this solely for your sake, remember. I want to disarm you. I am afraid you haven't a good heart. You're too vindictive, aren't you?'

He spoke playfully, and Clorinde laughed as she replied: 'Oh, yes, indeed; I'm very vindictive. I remember things a long time.'

Then, as she was about to leave him, he detained her for a moment by the door, and twice squeezed her fingers, but did not say another word.

Directly Clorinde had gone, Rougon returned to his private office. The spacious room was empty. He sat down at the writing-table and rested his elbows on his blotting-pad, breathing heavily in the surrounding silence. His eyelids dropped, and a deep reverie lulled him to a state of drowsiness for the next ten minutes. Then he suddenly started, stretched himself, and rang the bell.

Merle made his appearance.

'The prefect of the Somme is still here, isn't he?' asked Rougon.
'Show him in.'

Bracing up his short figure, the prefect entered the room with a pale, smiling face. He greeted the minister with all due deference. Rougon, who felt little energy, waited till he had finished. Then he asked him to be seated.

'I must tell you why I have sent for you, Monsieur le préfet,' he began. 'There are certain instructions which must be given by word of mouth. You are not ignorant of the fact that the revolutionary

party is raising its head. We have been within an ace of a frightful catastrophe. The country requires to be reassured, to feel that it can rely upon the energetic protection of the Government. His Majesty the Emperor, on his side, has come to the conclusion that some examples must be made, for hitherto his kindness has been strangely abused.'

Rougon spoke slowly, reclining in his arm-chair and playing the while with a large agate seal. The prefect expressed his approval of each sentence by a brisk nod.

'Your department,' continued the minister, 'is one of the worst. The republican ulcer—'

'I make every effort——' interposed the prefect.

'Don't interrupt me. It is necessary that strong repressive steps should be taken there; and it was to express my views to you on the subject that I wished to see you. We have been drawing up a list ——'

Then he began to search among his papers, took up a bundle of documents, and turned them over one by one.

'It is a return for the whole of France of the number of arrests that are considered necessary. The number for each department is proportionate to the blow which it is intended to strike. I want you to understand our object thoroughly. In the Haute-Marne, for instance, where the Republicans are in a very small minority, there are to be only three arrests. In the Meuse, on the other hand, there will be fifteen. As for your department, the Somme—isn't it?—well, for the Somme, we think——'

He turned the papers over again, blinking his heavy eyelids; then raised his head and looked the prefect in the face. 'Monsieur le préfet, you have twelve arrests to make,' said he.

The pale little man bowed. 'Twelve arrests,' he repeated. 'I understand your excellency perfectly.'

He seemed perplexed, however, as though affected by some slight misgivings which he would have preferred to conceal. However, after a few minutes' general conversation, just as the minister rose to dismiss him, he made up his mind to ask: 'Could your excellency tell me the persons who are to be arrested?'

'Oh! arrest anybody you like!' Rougon replied. 'I can't trouble myself about the details. I should never get through the work if I did. Leave Paris this evening and begin your arrests to-morrow. I advise you, however, to strike high. Down in your department you have some lawyers and merchants and druggists who busy themselves with politics. Just lock all those fellows up. It will have a good effect.'

The prefect passed his hand across his brow in an anxious way. He was already searching his memory, trying to think of certain lawyers, merchants, and druggists. However, he still nodded his head approvingly. But Rougon was not altogether pleased with his hesitating demeanour. 'I won't conceal from you,' he said, 'that his Majesty is by no means satisfied just now with the administrative staff. There will probably soon be a great change amongst the prefects. We need very devoted men in the present grave circumstances.'

This affected the prefect like a cut from a whip.

'Your excellency may rely on me,' he exclaimed. 'I have already fixed upon my men. There is a druggist at Péronne, a cloth merchant and a paper maker at Doullens; and, as for the lawyers, there's no lack of them; there's a perfect plague of them. Oh, I assure your excellency that I shall have no difficulty in making up the dozen. I am an old servant of the Empire.'

For another moment he chattered on about devoting himself to the saving of the country, and then took his leave with a very low bow. When he had closed the door behind him, the minister swayed his heavy frame with an air of doubt. He did not believe in little men. Then, without sitting down again, he drew a red line through La

Somme upon his list. The names of more than two-thirds of the departments were already scored out in the same way.

When Rougon again rang for Merle, he was annoyed to see that the ante-room was as full as ever. He fancied he could recognise the two ladies still standing by the table. 'I told you to send everybody away!' he cried. 'I am going out, and cannot see anybody else.'

'The editor of the *Vœu National* is there,' murmured the usher.

Rougon had forgotten the editor. He clasped his hands behind his back, and ordered Merle to admit him. The journalist was a man of some forty years of age, with a heavy face, and was very carefully dressed.

'Ah! here you are, sir!' said the minister roughly. 'Things cannot go on like this, I warn you of it.'

Then he began to pace the room, inveighing hotly against the press. It was demoralising everything, bringing about general disorganisation, and inciting to disorder of every kind. The very robbers who stabbed wayfarers on the high-roads were preferable to journalists, said he. A man might recover from a knife-thrust, but pens were poisoned. Then he went on to make even more odious comparisons; and gradually worked himself into a state of excitement, gesticulating angrily, and thundering forth his words. The editor, who had remained standing, bent his head to the storm, while his face wore an expression of submissive consternation.

'If your excellency would condescend to explain to me,' he at last ventured to say; 'I don't quite understand—'

'What?' roared Rougon furiously. Then he sprang forward, spread out the newspaper on his table, and pointed to the columns that were marked with red pencil. 'There are not ten lines free from offence!' he exclaimed. 'In your leading article, you appear to cast a doubt upon the government's capacities in the matter of repressive measures. In this paragraph on the second page you appear to allude to me when you speak of the insolent triumph of parvenus.

Among your miscellaneous items there are a lot of filthy stories, brainless attacks upon the upper classes.'

The editor clasped his hands in great alarm, and tried to get in a word. 'I assure your excellency—I am quite in despair that your excellency could suppose for a moment—I, too, who have such very warm admiration for your excellency—'

Rougon, however, paid no attention to this. 'And the worst of the matter is, sir,' he continued, 'that everyone is aware of your connection with the administration. How is it likely that the other newspapers will respect us, when those in our own pay do not? All my friends have been denouncing these abominations to me this morning.'

Then the editor joined Rougon in declaiming against the incriminated matter. He had read none of those articles and paragraphs, he said. But he would at once dismiss all his contributors. If his excellency wished it, he would send him a proof-copy of the paper every morning. Rougon, who had relieved his feelings, declined this offer. He had not the time to examine a proof-copy, he said. Just as he was dismissing the editor, however, a fresh thought seemed to strike him. 'Oh, I was forgetting,' he said. 'That well-bred woman who betrays her husband in the novel you are publishing serially supplies a detestable argument against good education. It ought not to be alleged that a woman of that kind could possibly commit such a sin.'

'The serial has had a great success,' murmured the editor, again feeling alarmed. 'I have read it, and have found it very interesting.'

'Ah! you've read it, have you? Well, now, does this wretched woman feel any remorse in the end?'

The editor carried his hand to his forehead, amazed, and trying to remember. 'Remorse? No, I think not,' he replied. Rougon had already opened the door, and as he closed it upon the journalist, he called after him: 'It is absolutely necessary that she should feel remorse! Insist upon the author filling her with remorse!'

X

A TRIP TO NIORT

Rougon had written to Du Poizat and M. Kahn asking them to spare him the infliction of an official reception at the gates of Niort. He arrived there one Saturday evening a little before seven o'clock, and at once went to the prefecture, with the intention of resting till noon the following day, for he was feeling very tired. After dinner, however, several people called. Doubtless the news of the minister's arrival had already spread through the town. A small drawing-room near the dining-room was thrown open, and a kind of impromptu reception was organised. Rougon, as he stood between the two windows, was obliged to stifle his yawns and reply as pleasantly as he could to the greetings offered to him.

One of the deputies of the department, the very attorney who had usurped M. Kahn's position as official candidate, was the first to make his appearance. He arrived quite out of breath, half scared, wearing a frock-coat and coloured trousers, for which he apologised on the ground that he had only just returned on foot from one of his farms, and had been anxious to pay his respects to his excellency as soon as possible. Then a short fat man appeared, wearing a somewhat tight-fitting dress coat and white gloves. There was an air of ceremonious regret about him. He was the mayor's first assessor, and had just been informed by his servant of Rougon's arrival. The mayor, he said, would be greatly distressed. He was not expecting his excellency till the following day and was at present at his estate of Les Varades, some six miles off. After the assessor there came a procession of six gentlemen with big feet, big hands, and big heavy faces. The prefect presented them to Rougon as distinguished members of the Statistical Society. Then the head-master of the state college arrived, bringing with him his wife, a charming blonde of eight-and-twenty. She was a Parisienne, and her dresses were the

wonder of Niort. She told Rougon somewhat bitterly of her great dislike for provincial life.

M. Kahn, who had dined with the minister and the prefect, was on his side hotly plied with questions respecting the next day's ceremony. It had been arranged that the party would repair to a spot some two or three miles from the town, in the district known as Les Moulins, where it was intended that the first tunnel on the new line from Niort to Angers should be pierced; and there the Minister of the Interior was to fire the first mine. Rougon, who had assumed a homely good-natured manner, said that he merely wanted to do what he could to honour an old friend's laborious enterprise. He moreover considered himself to be an adopted son of the department of Deux-Sèvres, which in former days had sent him to the Legislative Assembly. To tell the truth, however, the real object of his journey was in accordance with Du Poizat's strongly urged advice to display himself, in the plenitude of power, to his old constituents, so as to make sure of their support should it ever become necessary for him to enter the Corps Législatif.

From the windows of the little drawing-room the town could be seen black and slumberous. No further visitors called. The news of the minister's arrival had come too late in the day. This circumstance, however, gave an additional feeling of triumph to the few zealous ones who had put in an appearance at the prefect's. They gave no hint of retiring, but seemed quite elated with joy at being the first to meet his excellency in private conversation. The mayor's assessor repeated in a doleful voice, through which rang a note of jubilation: '*Mon Dieu!* how distressed the mayor will be! And the presiding judge, too, and the public prosecutor and all the other gentlemen!'

Towards nine o'clock, however, it might have been supposed that the whole town was in the ante-room, for a loud tramping of feet was heard there. Then a servant entered the drawing-room and announced that the chief commissary of police desired to pay his respects to his excellency. And it was Gilquin who made his appearance: Gilquin, looking quite gorgeous in evening dress and

straw-coloured gloves and kid boots. Du Poizat had given him a place in his department. He bore himself very well, the only traces of his old manner being a somewhat swaggering motion of his shoulders and a marked disinclination to part with his hat, which he persisted in holding against his hip in imitation of a pose which he had studied on a tailor's fashion-plate. He bowed to Rougon and addressed him with exaggerated humility. 'I venture to recall myself to the kind recollection of your excellency, whom I had the honour of meeting several times in Paris,' said he.

Rougon smiled, and he and Gilquin chatted for a few moments. Then the latter made his way into the dining-room, where tea had just been served, and he there found M. Kahn, who was glancing over a list of the guests invited to the next day's ceremony. In the little drawing-room the conversation had now turned upon the grandeur of the Emperor's reign. Du Poizat, standing by Rougon's side, was extolling the Empire, and they bowed to one another as though they were mutually congratulating themselves upon some personal achievement, while the citizens of Niort clustered round, agape with respectful admiration.

'What clever fellows they are, eh?' said Gilquin, who was watching the scene through the open doorway.

Then, as he proceeded to pour some rum into his tea, he gave M. Kahn a nudge. Du Poizat, lean and enthusiastic, with his irregular white teeth and feverish, childish face all aglow with triumph, appeared to take Gilquin's fancy. 'Ah, you should have seen him when he first arrived in the department,' said the commissary in a low voice. 'I was with him. He stamped his feet angrily as he walked along. He no doubt felt a grudge against the people here: and since he's been prefect, he's been amusing himself by avenging all his youthful grievances. The townspeople who knew him when he was a poor miserable fellow don't feel inclined to smile now when they see him go past. He makes a strong prefect; he's quite cut out for the post. He's very different from that fellow Langlade, whom he superseded, a mere ladies' man, as fair as a girl. We came across

photographs of ladies in very low dresses even amongst the official papers in his room.'

Then Gilquin paused. He fancied that the wife of the head-master had her eyes on him. And so, desirous of displaying the graces of his person, he bent forward again to speak to M. Kahn. 'Have you heard of Du Poizat's meeting with his father?' he asked. 'Oh, it was the most amusing thing in the world. The old man, you know, is a retired process-server, who has got a nice little pile together by lending petty sums by the week at high interest; and he now lives like a wolf in an old ruin of a house where he keeps loaded guns in the hall. Well, he had told his son a score of times that he would come to the gallows; and Du Poizat had long dreamt of having his revenge. That, indeed, was one of his reasons for wanting to be prefect here. So one morning he put on his finest uniform, and, under the pretext of making a round, he went and knocked at the old man's house. Then, after a good quarter of an hour's parley, the father opened the door, a pale little old man he was, and he gazed with a stupefied look at his son's gold-laced uniform. Well, now, guess what was the first thing he said, as soon as he discovered that his son had become the prefect! "Don't send for the taxes any more, Leopold!" Yes, those were his very words. He didn't show the slightest fatherly emotion. When Du Poizat came back, he was biting his lips, and his face was as white as a sheet. His father's unruffled tranquillity had quite exasperated him. Ah! he'll never manage to subdue the old man!'

M. Kahn nodded his head discreetly. He had slipped the list of guests into his pocket, and was now sipping a cup of tea while glancing occasionally into the adjoining room. 'Rougon is half asleep,' he said. 'Those idiots ought to have enough sense to leave him and let him go to bed. I want him to be in good form for to-morrow.'

'I hadn't seen him for some time,' said Gilquin. 'He has put on more flesh.' Then, lowering his voice, he continued: 'They managed it very cleverly, those two fine fellows! They worked some quiet trick or other out of that bomb affair at the Opera which I had warned them

of. It came off, as you know; but Rougon pretends that he went to the prefecture and that no one there would believe him. Well, that's his business, and there's no occasion to say any more about it. On the day of the affair, Du Poizat stood me a ripping *déjeuner* at a café on the boulevards. Oh! what a time we had! We went to a theatre in the evening, I think, but I haven't any very distinct recollection of it, for I slept for two days afterwards.'

M. Kahn now appeared to find Gilquin's confidences somewhat alarming, for he got up and left the dining-room. Then the commissary felt quite convinced that the head-master's wife was certainly gazing at him. So he also went back into the drawing-room and busied himself about her, and ended by bringing her some tea, biscuits and cake. He really carried himself very well; he looked like a gentleman who had been badly brought up, and this appeared to influence the beautiful blonde in his favour.

However, the deputy was now engaged in demonstrating the necessity of having a new church at Niort; the mayor's assessor asked for a bridge; and the head-master urged the desirability of extending the college buildings, while the six members of the Statistical Society silently nodded approval of everything.

'Well, we will see about these matters to-morrow, gentlemen,' said Rougon, whose eyelids were half-closed. 'I am here for the purpose of inquiring into your needs and doing what I can to satisfy them.'

Ten o'clock was just striking when a servant came into the room and said something to the prefect, who at once whispered a few words in the minister's ear. The latter then hastened out of the drawing room. He found Madame Correur waiting for him in an adjoining apartment. She was accompanied by a tall, slim girl with a colourless freckled face.

'So you are in Niort, are you?' Rougon exclaimed as he joined them.

'Only since this afternoon,' replied Madame Correur. 'We are staying just opposite, on the Place de la Préfecture, at the Hôtel de Paris.'

And then she explained that she had come from Coulonges, where she had been spending a couple of days. But suddenly she paused to direct the minister's attention to the tall girl beside her. 'This,' said she, 'is Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq, who has been kind enough to accompany me.'

Herminie Billecoq made a ceremonious bow, and Madame Correur proceeded: 'I didn't say anything to you about this expedition of mine, because I thought you might oppose it; but I really couldn't help going. I was very anxious to see my brother. When I heard of your coming to Niort, I hastened here. We looked out for you and saw you enter the prefecture, but we thought it better to defer our visit till later on. These little towns are much given to malicious scandal!'

Rougon nodded assent. He was indeed thinking that plump Madame Correur with her painted face and bright yellow dress might, to provincial eyes, very well appear to be a compromising person.

'Well, and did you see your brother?' he asked.

'Yes,' Madame Correur replied, clenching her teeth; 'yes, I saw him. Madame Martineau didn't venture to turn me out of the house. She was burning some sugar over the fire when I went in. Oh, my poor brother! I knew that he was ill, but it gave me quite a shock to see him so emaciated. He has promised that he won't disinherit me; it would be contrary to his principles. He has made his will; and his property will be divided between me and Madame Martineau. Isn't that so, Herminie?'

'Yes, the property is to be divided,' declared the tall girl. 'He told you so when you first got there, and repeated it when he saw you away from the door. Oh! there's no doubt about it; I heard him say so.'

Then Rougon tried to get rid of the two women by saying: 'Well, I'm delighted to hear it. You will feel much easier now. These family quarrels always get made up. Come, good-night; I'm going to bed now.'

But Madame Correur detained him. She had taken her handkerchief out of her pocket and was dabbing her eyes with it, seemingly affected with sudden grief. 'Oh, my poor Martineau!' said she, 'he was so kind and good, and forgave me with such readiness! I wish you knew how good he is, my dear friend. It is on his account that I have hurried here, to petition you in his favour——'

Her tears prevented her from saying more, and she began to sob. Rougon was at a loss to know what it meant, and looked at the two women in astonishment. Then Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq also began to cry, but less demonstratively than Madame Correur. She was a very sensitive young person, and was readily affected by another's grief.

'Monsieur Martineau has compromised himself in politics,' she stammered amidst her tears.

Thereupon Madame Correur began to speak with great volubility. 'You will remember,' she said, 'that I hinted my fears to you one day. I had a presentiment of what would happen. Martineau was showing Republican proclivities. At the last election he behaved very wildly, and made the most desperate exertions in favour of the opposition candidate. I was aware of things which I don't want to mention. However, it was all bound to have a bad result. When I got to the Golden Lion at Coulonges, where we had engaged a room, I questioned the people there, and I learnt a good deal more from them. Martineau has been guilty of all kinds of follies. No one in the neighbourhood would be surprised if he were to be arrested. Every day they expect to see the gendarmes come and take him off. You can imagine what a shock this was to me! And so I thought of you, my dear friend——'

Her utterance was again choked by her sobs. Then Rougon tried to reassure her. He would mention the subject to Du Poizat, he said, and he would stop any proceedings that might have been instituted. 'I am the master,' he even added; 'come, go to bed and sleep quietly.'

But Madame Correur shook her head and twisted her pocket-handkerchief. Her eyes were quite dry now. 'Ah! you don't know everything,' she said. 'It is a more serious matter than you suppose. He takes Madame Martineau to mass, but stays outside himself and proclaims that he never sets foot in a church; and this causes a dreadful scandal every Sunday. Then, too, he frequents a retired lawyer in the neighbourhood, one of the men of '48, and can be heard talking to him for hours in the most dreadful way. Suspicious-looking men, too, have often been seen to slip into his garden at night-time, with the intention, no doubt, of receiving directions from him.'

Rougon shrugged his shoulders at each fresh detail, but Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq, as though shocked by such tolerance, added sharply: 'And he receives letters with red seals from all sorts of countries. The postman told us that. He didn't want to speak about it at first, he was quite pale. We had to give him twenty sous. And then, a month ago, Monsieur Martineau left home for a week, without anyone in the neighbourhood having the slightest idea where he went. The landlady of the Golden Lion told us that he hadn't even taken any luggage with him.'

'Herminie, I beg of you to be quiet!' said Madame Correur uneasily. 'Martineau has got quite sufficient against him as it is. There is no occasion for us to add any more.'

Rougon was now listening and glancing at the two women in turn. He had become very serious. 'Well, if he has compromised himself so much as that——' he began, pausing, however, as he fancied that he could detect a fiery gleam igniting in Madame Correur's troubled eyes. 'Well, I will do all I can,' he resumed; 'but I make no promises.'

'It is all up with him; it is all up with him!' exclaimed Madame Correur. 'I feel quite certain of it. We don't want to say anything; but if we told all——' Then in her turn she paused and began to bite her pocket handkerchief. 'And to think that I hadn't seen him for twenty

years, and have only now just seen him to be parted from him for ever, perhaps! He was so kind, so very kind!"

Herminie, however, gently shrugged her shoulders and made signs to Rougon, as if to tell him that he must excuse a sister's despair, but that the old attorney was really a great rascal. 'If I were you,' she said to Madame Correur, 'I would tell everything. It will be much the best.'

Then the elder woman seemed to brace herself up for a great effort. 'You remember,' she said, lowering her voice, 'the "Te Deums," which were sung everywhere, when the Emperor so miraculously escaped being murdered in front of the Opera-house? Well, on the very day when they were singing the "Te Deum" at Coulonges, one of Martineau's neighbours asked him if he wasn't going to church, and the wretched man replied, "Why should I go to church, indeed? I don't care a fig for your Emperor!"'

'I don't care a fig for your Emperor!' repeated Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq, with an air of consternation.

'You can understand my alarm now,' continued the retired boarding-house keeper. 'As I told you before, no one in the neighbourhood would be the least surprised to see him arrested.'

As she spoke these last words, she fixed her eyes searchingly on Rougon. He made no immediate reply. He seemed to be trying to read her flabby face, her pale eyes, which blinked beneath light and scanty brows. For a moment his gaze rested on her plump white neck. Then he threw out his arms and said: 'I can do nothing, I assure you. I am not the master.'

And he gave his reasons. He felt certain scruples, he said, about interfering in affairs of this kind. If the law had been invoked, matters would have to take their course. It would even have been better if he had not known Madame Correur, as his friendship for her would tie his hands, for he had sworn never to render certain services to his friends. However, he would inquire into the matter. And he tried to console her, as though her brother were already on

his way to some penal settlement. She bent her head, and her sobs shook the big coil of light hair which lay on the nape of her neck. Presently she grew calmer, and as she took leave, she pushed Herminie in front of her, exclaiming: 'Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq; but I fancy I have already introduced her to you. Please excuse me, my head is in such a state. She is the young lady for whom we succeeded in obtaining a dowry. The officer who seduced her has not yet been able to marry her on account of the interminable formalities which have to be gone through. Thank his excellency, my dear.'

The tall girl expressed her thanks, blushing, as she did so, like an innocent maiden in whose presence some indelicate remark has been made. Madame Correur let her leave the room before her; then she pressed Rougon's hand tightly, and, bending towards him, said: 'I rely upon you, Eugène!'

When the minister returned to the little drawing-room, he found it deserted. Du Poizat had succeeded in getting rid of the deputy, the mayor's assessor and the six members of the Statistical Society. M. Kahn had also taken his departure, after making an appointment for ten o'clock the next morning. In the dining-room there only remained the head-master's wife and Gilquin, who were eating little cakes, and chatting about Paris. Gilquin made soft eyes at the lady and talked to her about the races, the picture-shows, and a new piece at the Comédie Française, with the ease of a man to whom all kinds of life were familiar. The head-master, in the meantime, was speaking in a low tone to the prefect about the fourth form professor, who was suspected of Republican proclivities.

However, eleven o'clock struck. The remaining visitors rose and bowed to his excellency, and Gilquin was just about to retire with the head-master and his wife, to the latter of whom he had offered his arm, when Rougon detained him.

'Monsieur le Commissaire,' he said, 'a word with you, I beg.'

When they were alone together, he addressed himself to the commissary and prefect simultaneously: 'What is this business of Martineau's?' he asked. 'Has the man really compromised himself?'

Gilquin smiled, and Du Poizat proceeded to give a few particulars: 'I wasn't thinking of taking any steps in the affair,' he said. 'The man has certainly been denounced to me, and I have received letters about him. There is no doubt that he mixes himself up in politics. But there have already been four arrests in the department, and I should have preferred making up my five, which was the number you fixed, by locking up the master of the fourth form at the college here who reads revolutionary books to his pupils.'

'I have been told of some very serious things,' said Rougon sternly. 'His sister's tears must not be allowed to save this man Martineau, if he is really as dangerous as is alleged. The public safety is at stake.' Then he turned towards Gilquin. 'What is your opinion on the matter?' he asked.

'I will arrest him in the morning,' the commissary replied. 'I know all about the matter. I have seen Madame Correur at the Hôtel de Paris, where I generally dine.'

Du Poizat made no objection. He took a little memorandum-book from his pocket, struck out a name, and wrote another in its place, at the same time recommending the commissary of police to keep his eye upon the master of the fourth form. Rougon accompanied Gilquin to the door. 'This man Martineau is not very well, I believe,' he said. 'Go to Coulanges yourself, and treat him decently.'

Gilquin pulled himself up with an offended air, and setting aside all respect for his excellency, familiarly exclaimed: 'Do you take me for a mere common policeman? Ask Du Poizat to tell you about the druggist whom I arrested on the day before yesterday. There was a lady with him, but nobody knows it. I always act with the greatest discretion.'

Rougon slept soundly for nine hours. When he opened his eyes the next morning, at about half-past eight, he sent a message for Du

Poizat to come to him. The prefect arrived with a cigar in his mouth, and seemed in high spirits. They talked and joked together as they had done in former days, when they had lodged at Madame Correur's, and had roused each other with playful slaps. However, while the minister was washing, he questioned the prefect about the neighbourhood, asking for particulars of the different officials and their various desires and vanities. He wanted to have a pleasant remark ready for each of them.

'Oh, don't worry yourself,' replied Du Poizat, with a laugh; 'I will prompt you.'

Then he gave him some information about the different people with whom he would come into contact. Rougon occasionally made him repeat what he said in order to impress it upon his memory. At ten o'clock, M. Kahn made his appearance. They all three had *déjeuner* together, and finally arranged the details of the ceremony. The prefect would make a speech, as would also M. Kahn. Rougon would follow the latter; but they considered that a fourth speech would be desirable. For a moment they thought of the mayor, but Du Poizat declared that he was a stupid fellow, and advised the selection of the chief surveyor of bridges and highways, to whom the proceedings of the day naturally seemed to point, though M. Kahn was afraid of this official's spirit of criticism. As they got up from table, M. Kahn took the minister aside to tell him of the points which he hoped he would bring forward in his speech.

It had been arranged that the party should meet at the prefecture at half-past ten. The mayor and his assessor arrived together. The former stammered forth his unbounded regret that he had been absent from Niort on the previous evening, while the latter affectedly hoped that his excellency had slept well, and had quite recovered from his fatigue. Then the President of the Civil Tribunal, the public prosecutor and his two assessors, and the chief surveyor of bridges and highways made their appearance. They were quickly followed by the receiver-general, the comptroller of the direct taxes, and the registrar of the department. Several of these officials were

accompanied by their wives. The wife of the head-master of the college, the beautiful blonde, wore a most effective sky-blue dress, and attracted great attention. She begged his excellency to excuse her husband, who had been prevented from coming by an attack of gout, which had seized him soon after his return home on the previous evening. However, other personages were arriving; the colonel of the seventy-eighth regiment of the Line, which was stationed at Niort; the President of the Tribunal of Commerce, the two justices of the peace, the conservator of rivers and forests, accompanied by his three daughters, with various municipal councillors and delegates from the consultative Chamber of Arts and Manufactures, the Statistical Society, and the Council of the Board of Arbitration between employers and employed.

The reception was held in the large drawing-room of the prefecture. Du Poizat made the presentations, and the minister received all the guests with smiling bows as though they were old friends. He exhibited wonderful knowledge about each of them. He spoke to the public prosecutor of a speech lately made by him in the course of a trial for adultery; he asked the comptroller of taxes, in sympathetic tones, after the health of his wife, who had been laid up for the last two months; he detained the colonel of the seventy-eighth for a moment to let him see that he was not unacquainted with the brilliant progress made by his son at Saint Cyr; he talked about boots to a municipal councillor, who owned a great boot-making establishment; while with the registrar, who was an enthusiastic archæologist, he discussed a druidical stone which had been discovered during the previous week. Whenever he hesitated, thinking of the right thing to say, Du Poizat came to his assistance and cleverly prompted him in a whisper.

As the President of the Tribunal of Commerce came into the room and bowed to him, Rougon exclaimed, in an affable voice: 'Ah! are you alone, Monsieur le Président? At all events I trust that we shall have the pleasure of seeing your wife at the banquet this evening
—'

He stopped short, noticing the expression of embarrassment which came over the faces around him. Du Poizat, moreover, nudged his elbow. Then he recollect ed that the President of the Tribunal of Commerce was living apart from his wife in consequence of certain scandals. He had made a mistake. He had thought that he was addressing the other president, the chief judge of the Civil Tribunal. However, he was in no way disconcerted. He still smiled; and, making no reference to his unfortunate remark, continued, with a shrewd air: 'I have a pleasant piece of news for you, monsieur. I know that my colleague, the Minister of Justice, has put your name down for the cross of the Legion of Honour. Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it, but you will keep my secret.'

The President of the Tribunal of Commerce turned quite scarlet. He almost choked with joy. His friends pressed round him to congratulate him, while Rougon made a mental note of this cross—which he had so opportunely thought of bestowing—so that he might not forget to mention the matter to his colleague. It was the betrayed husband that he was decorating. Du Poizat smiled with admiration.

There were now some fifty people in the drawing-room. They still waited on; but the faces of many of them were beginning to show signs of weariness.

'Time is flying; we might perhaps make a start,' said the minister.

But the prefect bent towards him, and explained that the deputy, M. Kahn's former opponent, had not yet arrived. Presently, however, this gentleman made his appearance, perspiring profusely. His watch had stopped, he said, and he had been quite put out of his reckoning. Then, wishing to let the company know of his visit on the previous evening, he went on to remark, in a loud voice: 'As I was saying to your excellency last night——' And afterwards he walked off alongside of Rougon and informed him that he intended to return to Paris on the following morning. The Easter recess had terminated on the previous Tuesday, and the Chamber was again sitting. He had

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